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Two Christmas Hymns

By Alfred Domett



*First published in London, in
1837 and 1875*



Greetings of ALL SOULS CHURCH
Chicago, Ill.....Christmas, mdcccxcvii

R. E.

Xmas Cards of

Jenkins Lloyd Jones

All Souls Church,
THE NEW UNITY

*3939 Langley Avenue,
Chicago.*



ALFRED DOMETT, poet, traveler, statesman, was born at Camberwell, England, in 1811. After studying at Cambridge he traveled extensively in America and elsewhere; afterwards settled in New Zealand, practiced law, occupied high positions in the legislative and executive departments of the new government which he helped organize. He was fellow townsman and beloved companion of Robert Browning; is the "dear old friend," referred to in Robert Browning's "Guardian Angel," and is the "Waring" who

*Glides away
Like a ghost at break of day,*

in Browning's poem of this name.

Domett died, beloved and revered by those who knew him, in 1887. He is described by one who knew him as a "sterling, manly, independent nature." Competent critics have ventured to place this first hymn next to the great Christmas hymn of John Milton, which carried our Christmas greeting last year. The second hymn, less known and less accessible, will reward the study it requires. The two hymns taken together enforce a truth dear to All Souls Church, viz., that rational study is not

destructive of deep love and high reverence for Jesus of Nazareth. The Nazarene peasant, the Jesus of humanity will ever quicken Christmas joys, inspire Christmas hymns, and receive the glad homage of Christmas carols.

The text followed is that found in "Flotsam and Jetsam; Rhymes Old and New." Published by Smith & Elder, London, 1877.






A Christmas Hymn

(Old Style, 1837)

I

T was the calm and silent night!—
Seven hundred years and fifty-three
Had Rome been growing up to might,
And now was Queen of land and sea!
No sound was heard of clashing wars;
Peace brooded o'er the hushed domain;
Apollo, Pallas, Jove, and Mars,
Held undisturbed their ancient reign,
In the solemn midnight
Centuries ago!

II

'T'was in the calm and silent night!—
The senator of haughty Rome
Impatient urged his chariot's flight,
From lordly revel rolling home!
Triumphal arches gleaming swell
His breast with thoughts of boundless sway;
What recked the *Roman* what befell
A paltry province far away,
In the solemn midnight
Centuries ago!

III

Within that province far away
 Went plodding home a weary boor :
A streak of light before him lay,
 Fall 'n through a half-shut stable door
Across his path. He passed — for naught
 Told what was going on within ;
How keen the stars ! his only thought ;
 The air how calm and cold and thin,
 In the solemn midnight
 Centuries ago !

IV

O strange indifference !— low and high
 Drowned over common joys and cares :
The earth was still — but knew not why ;
 The world was listening — unawares !
How calm a moment may precede
 One that shall thrill the world for ever !
To that still moment none would heed,
 Man's doom was linked no more to sever
 In the solemn midnight
 Centuries ago !

V

It *is* the calm and solemn night!
 A thousand bells ring out, and throw
Their joyous peals abroad, and smite
 The darkness, charmed and holy *now!*
The night that erst no name had worn,
 To it a happy name is given ;
For in that stable lay new-born
 The peaceful Prince of Earth and Heaven
 In the solemn midnight
 Centuries ago!



A Christmas Hymn

(New Style, 1875)

I



GAIN the dumb delight,
The winding-sheet of Winter white!
The great world's feverish moan sinks
muted and muffled,
As Nature lays cool hands divine
Upon its weary heart, awhile unruffled:
The splendor-fibred trees pure coral shine;
All still!—and if small birds, so black and large
perchance
In sudden startled quest
On the dazzling tracery rest
And shake snow-powder off, they but enhance
The sacred silence of the bright white universal
trance.

II

Then bells burst out along
The pale dim-burnished sky they throng;
Their floating tones in yellow light dissolving,
Like joys that die in rapture soft;
Or peal on peal in headlong haste revolving,
Full many a merry somersault aloft

The airy tumblers turn in their ethereal play ;
Or down, down, down they come
From the full resounding dome,
In frank, confiding, open-armed array,
Like blissful angels charged to bring their old good
news to-day !

III

But why so glad, you bells ?
'T is shame and wrong your rapture tells !
Cold morn ! why halo round with cheery kindness
Your chill return, which but recalls
That deed of rabid hate and ruinous blindness,
Most piteous scene in History's pictured halls,
The one World-murder done in ghostly Palestine !
Is it a cause for mirth
That the dull ferocious Earth
In mirk and mystery left so long to pine,
So welcomes spirits when they come surcharged with
light divine !

IV

Swords flash and sceptres wave—
Could none that gentlest grandeur save!
O widest woe! that this, Time's boon most royal,
A rabble spurned with ribald scorn—
No worldly might to worth so wondrous loyal!—
See! 'tis the golden solitary Morn ;
See! splendid mists, still palms and glistening kine ;
the Sun
Undiamonds the blades
Of the shortening fig-tree shades ;
Soft clouds ascending gently one by one
The hollow cave of liquid light, emerge o'er moun-
tains dun ;

V

If, by the popped corn,
 There sits in Syrian garb wayworn,
 Upon a rock the level beams are firing,
 One who, of ample brow sublime,
 And ardent look serene yet so aspiring,
 Speaks such great-hearted music, for a time
 The brazen-kilted Knight his Emperor's work delays,
 Must draw the studded rein;
 And the boor his creaking wain
 Let stand—spellbound by thoughts that so
 amaze—
 So boundless, kindling, fresh, they match that rising
 Day-Star's rays:

VI

If still, as Sunset fills
 With awe the hushed vermilion hills,
 Blue dusk the listening fishers' lake obscuring—
 Those easy and immortal words
 Drop quietly as footprints less enduring
 Red petrified sea-beaches' keep of birds
 A million years ago alit from vanished skies:—
 Can none, O churlish Fate!
 Of the brave and wise and great—
 None look into those deep mysterious eyes,
 And read how vast a human Soul informs that clay
 disguise!

VII

To murder one so young!
 To still that wonder-teeming tongue
 Ere half the fulness of its mellowed glory
 Had flashed in mild sheet-lightnings forth!
 Who knows, had that majestic Life grown hoary,
 Long versed in all man's weakness, woes and
 worth,

What beams had pierced the clouds that veil this
voyage of care!

Not Zeus, nor Baal's throne

Nor Osiris quelled alone,

But Doubt, or worse assurance of Despair,
Or Superstition's brood that blends the tiger with the
hare!

VIII

Who knows but we had caught
Some hint from pure impassioned Thought,
How Matter's links and Spirit's that still fly us,
Can break and still leave Spirit free;
How Will can act o'er-mastered by no bias;
Why Good omnipotent lets Evil be;
What balm heals beauteous Nature's universal flaw;
And how, below, above,
It is Love, and only Love
Bids keen Sensation glut Destruction's maw—
Love rolls this groaning Sea of Life on pitiless rocks
of Law!

IX

This day, then, must we ask
Befits it not its radiant mask,
Where Spring's green pulses sleep, so soon to
waken,
Beneath bright innocence of snow?
But rather, like the human heart forsaken,
Some grand still Polar waste, where sad rays
throw
Long violet solemn shades, and luridly illumine
Each iceberg's sullen frown,
As the blood-red Sun goes down
At ghastly noon, and to their dismal doom
Leaves moaning crags and grinding floes in loneliest
lifeless gloom?

X

Nay—is it then so slight
 A thing that this Day sprung to light
 Of moral beauty Man's supreme ideal;
 A soul of sympathy so vast
 'Twas scarce conceived till first he made it real!
 That of all Facts left for thé heart at last—
 Looming beyond the light by Logic's pharos
 thrown,
 Its faintest circled rim,
 In the supersensuous dim,
 The most majestic—loveliest—made its own
 The purest, widest, truest Soul, and loftiest ever
 known!

XI

At least—at lowest, say,
 A quickening breeze of Life this day
 Came, when into dead calm had feebly drifted
 Man's Hope of Hopes—an Albatross
 Flapping vain wings to rise—and freshly lifted
 The worn Seafarer for a flight across
 Some thousands of new years o'er the Material Deep
 Where Man must founder not,
 Or his very race would rot!
 Fell swamp from which kind Fate his course
 must keep
 Or down 'mid crawlers of the slime 'twill be his doom
 to creep!

XII

What! this One, Nature's—all!
 (Though why not God's, that Mystery call?)
 O none the less Mankind's upsoaring splendid
 Through brightening gyres of Circumstance
 Is with his great heart-truths and hopes so blended,
 To keep that height they give its only chance!—

So firmly through the woof—to crown the array so
dense

Of Shapes of light and love—
Amaranthine flowers he wove,
The imperial purple of pre-eminence
Man wears, were tattered, would you tear those
wreaths immortal thence!

XIII

True, this Soul-Conqueror—this—
World-melting Marvel from the Abyss—
Cared not, in subtly faint Hellenic fashion
To syllogise of life to-be,
But kindled to insatiate thirst and passion
That old ambition of Eternity
Which fires Man's heart for noblest deeds it dreams
of here!

Breath mightiest and alone
To evoke its grandest tone;
Of each harmonious rise in his career,
Each diapason of ascent, the stirring key-note clear!

XIV

But this One bade him strain,
Say you, to heights he seeks in vain—
Ideal perfections that bemock his station?
Nay, but the endless strain and strife
Secure his nature's endless elevation!—
The germ, deep-hid in life, of higher life,
Conscience, this Sunburst woke; Truth, Justice,
Love, his ray
So quickened to outflower
With predominance and power,
The palmy growth still claims imperious way
Through this World's cramping crystal walls to some
diviner Day!

XV

And if, in fine excess
 And secret happy consciousness,
 The fervid aim at fitness for instalment
 In some rare clime Truth, Love and Right
 Flush with full bloom unreached in this en-
 thrainment,
 Be forced to leap into a faithlike sight
 In such rare clime extant, its actual glorious goal,—
 Against assurance sure
 It must endlessly endure!
 Shall not the first these heart-depths to unroll
 Be hailed Discoverer and dear King among the Lords
 of Soul!

XVI

Spurn from his Faith—of Will
 Love-fired to selfless war with Ill,
 And deathless life to soothe the undying fever—
 Hell's blight, the shamble's stains and
 steams;
 It were a Sun to flood and flush for ever
 The boundless blue—no cloud-hole's shower of
 beams
 Silvering the sea-gloom—glory girt with hate and
 shame!
 A lily pure, that creed
 Would be loved—what crimson weed
 Of Greece so loved! sweet faiths of graceful
 fame
 Olympian poppies of no charm beside its fragrant
 flame!

XVII

What though wan Logic deems
Illusions these immortal dreams ;
Hesperian garden-growth of golden apples
Which she can prove not—see nor touch ;
Their realm at least is real ; for all she grapples
Of actual fruit or blossom hangs o'er such
A shadowy garden's wall, and springs from roots
within ;
Aye ! *all* she sees and knows
But in Mystery springs and grows ;
Her simplest queries can no answer win :
“ What can Attraction be ? or Force ? or Motion how
begin ? ”

XVIII

To sing that golden fruit
Hope, Justice, Love, are never mute ;
White Maidens warbling through the Dusk its
splendor ;
And Science, our Alcides true
Shall make the Dragon—Matter—yet surrender
The Spirit-realm it guards and glides into !
Meanwhile the men of mightiest heart our course
must light ;
All honor be to them,
And to Him the diadem
Who rose, the Atlas from whose heaven-bathed
height
In clearest prospect glowed the unimaginable sight !

XIX

Fear you 't will die away,
Flit, wholly fade in fancied Day?
Is the World's long advance a masque so hollow!
But Heart is pioneer of Mind—
The pillared fire her patient march must follow!
He to transfigure, glorify his kind,
Made all the Universe a breathing human breast;
Man's race one rose of snow
Through Eternity to blow,
His great Idea! shall Hope or Reason rest
Below, while, though mist-veiled, on high, towers so
sublime a crest!

XX

Look where gigantic flowers
Most gorgeous deck Peruvian bowers;
Milk-white lake-lilies purple-hearted shining
Shield-broad, each leaf an islet wide,
A leathery floor with crinkled wine-dark lining
Deep-cabled, firm, where ghost-like stalk and glide
Plover and Ibis shy, by no vibration checked:
—'Tis on black lakes obscure
Which the forest-glooms immure;—
Ink-waters strange that no light-rays reflect:—
So in sad days of darkest doubt Truth's brightest
blooms expect!

XXI

Think you the mighty Sea
Of Nature can exhausted be?
Press on, O Man! no upward impulse scorning!
High instincts pant their race to run!
Fresh Souls will come auroral—sons of Morning,
To rouse and rein these coursers of the Sun

Along the empyreal path He was the first to trace!—
—Then still recall, O Earth,
With a festal smile, his birth!
For this, o'er Earth's benumbed and beauteous
face,
Still, Winter, breathe your chilly charms of kindest
innocent grace!

XXII

You hollies scarlet-bossed,
Purple with dainty rims of frost
Your puckered leaves for this—or gleam snow-
spangled!
Prank every fringe with crystals gay,
You cedars! Ring sweet bells, by fears unjangled;
Peal forth melodious promise of a day
When in more luminous love—more loving knowledge
great—
In the serene sunshine
Of intelligence divine,
The whole majestic World shall walk elate
With her sublimest hero's faith in Man's exalted fate!



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